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DAWN

PPP grills govt in NA over takeover of motorway in Punjab

• NCCI being strengthened with experienced officers, assembly told • Ex-speaker assured bill seeking right to appeal against military court verdicts will be placed on agenda on next private member's day

By Iftikhar A. Khan

ISLAMABAD: A day after the PPP's threat to boycott National Assembly forced the government to withdraw an ordinance issued without President's assent, the PML-N led government came under fire from the key ally again — this time over the federal takeover of the Rs465 billion Lahore-Bahawalnagar Motorway project in violation of federal fiscal dues.

The issue was raised in the House by PPP lawmakers Syed Naveed Qamar, Dr Sharmila Faruqui and others through a calling attention notice expressing alarm over diversion of resources from nationally strategic projects.

Slamming the Centre for breaching fiscal protocols and undermining provincial autonomy, questioning why a provincial motorway project was being "federalised", Syed Naveed Qamar criticised the diversion of funds from key federal projects to the Motorway project.

"Such projects are dealt best at the provincial level," he said. Chaudhry Armaghan Subhani, Minister of State for Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, in response said that no funds had been diverted from PSDP to the Lahore-Bahawalnagar Motorway project.

Mr Qamar, however, said it was best course that the government does not divert funds from any source. "And if at all you need to build infrastructure projects, they should come under public-private partnership mode as Sindh is doing. Why it can't be done in Punjab," he asked.

Another PPP leader Sharmila Faruqui accused the government of violating fiscal agreements by including the provincial project in the PSDP without provincial consent.

She expressed concern over the National Highway Authority's Rs2.5 trillion "throw-forward," calling the project's federal funding a significant issue. "You cannot include a project in the PSDP unless the province agrees to 50 per cent funding," she said.

State Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Chaudhry Armaghan Subhani also said that the government was giving top priority to the Sukkur-Hyderabad Motorway project and it will be incorporated into the next Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP).

He said the project comprising five sections will be completed on a fast-track basis and noted that building motorways was the hallmark of the PML-N.

The National Assembly speaker referred the matter to the Planning and Development Panel for further review.

Minister of State for Interior Tallal Chaudhry informed the House that illegal call centres operating across the country were being targeted, pointing out that many had been set up in remote areas where there was no legitimate basis for such facilities to exist.

These centres, he claimed, were often linked to financial fraud and scams involving multiple nationalities and were contributing to the country's negative image abroad.

Responding to another point of order raised by members of the House, Mr Chaudhry said the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA) is facing capacity challenges, which had replaced the FIA's cybercrime wing.

He said at present, only around 523 personnel were available in the country in the authority, whereas complaints of financial fraud, online harassment and other cyber offences were increasing rapidly.

He said the government was according full attention to strengthening the NCCI with experienced officers being posted and new recruitments initiated.

Former speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaisar raised the issue of his bill seeking the right of appeal against verdicts of military courts and was assured by the chair the bill will be placed on agenda on the next private members's day.

DISPLACED Palestinians carry jerricans amidst tent shelters set up along the shore in Gaza City as strong winter winds swept the enclave.—AFP

At least 100 children killed in Gaza since ceasefire: UN

• Starmer expected to join Trump-led board to oversee Gaza, *Times* says
• Six dead as displaced Palestinians struggle to hold ground in torrential rain

GENEVA: At least 100 children have been killed by Israeli airstrikes and ground forces in Gaza since the start of a tenuous ceasefire three months ago, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

The UN children's agency Unicef said that at least 60 boys and 40 girls had been killed in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory since early October.

"More than 100 children have been killed in Gaza since the ceasefire," Unicef spokesman James Elder told reporters in Geneva.

"That's roughly a girl or a boy killed here every day during a ceasefire," he said, speaking from Gaza City.

"These children are killed from airstrikes, drone strikes, including suicide drones. They're killed from tank shelling. They're killed from live ammunition. They're killed from quad copters.

"We are at 100 — no doubt," he said, adding that the true number was likely higher. "A ceasefire that slows the bombs is progress but one that still buries children is not enough."

An official at Gaza's health ministry, which maintains casualty records, has reported a higher figure of 165 children killed during the tenuous ceasefire, out of a total 442 fatalities.

In November, authorities in Gaza said more than 70,000 people had been killed there since the beginning of the war. Nearly 80 per cent of buildings in Gaza have been destroyed or damaged in the relentless air and ground offensive, according to UN data.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is expected to accept an offer to sit on a US President Trump-led board that would temporarily run Gaza, *The Times* newspaper reported on Tuesday.

The report cited a senior British official as saying the first meeting was expected to take place next week on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Rainstorm, flood

Meanwhile, a rainstorm swept across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, flooding hundreds of tents, collapsing homes sheltering families displaced by two years of war and killing at least six people, local health officials said.

Medics said five people, including two women and a girl, died when homes collapsed near Gaza City's beach, while a one-year-old boy died of extreme cold in a tent in Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza.

Tents were torn from their stakes, some flying dozens of meters before crashing to the ground. Others lay crumpled in muddy pools as families scrambled to salvage what they could. Residents tried to rescue remaining shelters, hammering in loosened pegs and stacking sandbags around the edges to keep floodwaters from pouring inside.

"We didn't realize what was happening until the wall started collapsing an eight-meter-high wall, a strong concrete wall. Because of the speed and force of the wind, the wall fell on top of us, onto three tents, said Bassel Hamuda, a displaced man in Gaza.

The elderly man, 73 years old, was martyred. His son's wife was killed, and his son's daughter was killed, he said.—Agencies

Four terrorists killed in Kalat operation, says ISPR

Dawn Report

QUETTA: Four terrorists were killed by security forces during an intelligence-based operation in Kalat district of Balochistan, the military's media affairs wing said on Tuesday.

In a statement, the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) said that on Jan 12 (Monday) security forces conducted an IBO on the reported presence of terrorists belonging to Indian proxy Fitna al Hindustan.

The state has designated Balochistan-based terrorist groups as Fitna al Hindustan to highlight India's alleged role in terrorism and destabilisation across Pakistan.

During the operation, security forces effectively engaged the terrorists' location, the ISPR said, adding that four terrorists were killed after an "intense fire exchange".

"Weapons and ammunition were also recovered from the terrorists, who remained actively involved in numerous terrorist activities in the area," the statement added.

It stated that sanitisation operations were being conducted to eliminate any other Indian-sponsored terrorists found in the area.

It added that the counterterrorism campaign by security forces and law enforcement agencies would continue at full pace to wipe out the menace of foreign-sponsored and supported terrorism from the country.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif praised the security forces on the operation. In his statement posted by state broadcaster PTV on X, PM Shehbaz said security forces were achieving notable successes in their fight against terrorism under Azm-i-Istehkam.

"The whole nation stands with Pakistan's armed forces in the fight against terrorism," he said, reaffirming the government's resolve to eliminate terrorism from the country.

China rejects India's claim over Shaksgam valley in Kashmir

Dawn Report

MAO Ning

BEIJING: China has rejected India's claim over the Shaksgam valley in Kashmir and said that the territory "belongs to China".

At a press conference on Monday, when asked by the *Press Trust of India* for comment on the Indian criticism of China's infrastructure development projects in the Shaksgam valley, China's Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said that it was "fully justified" for China to conduct infrastructure construction "on its own territory".

"The territory you mentioned belongs to China," she said.

India's foreign ministry spokesperson had on Friday said that it reserved the right to take necessary measures to safeguard its interests as the Shaksgam valley was "an Indian territory".

"We have never recognised the so-called China-Pakistan boundary agreement that happened in 1963. We have consistently maintained that the agreement is illegal and invalid," he said at a press conference in response to a question from India's state-owned public television broadcaster Doordashan.

The Indian spokesperson said that New Delhi also does not "recognise the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor".

"The entire union territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are an integral and inalienable part of India," he claimed, adding, "This has been clearly conveyed to Pakistani and the Chinese authorities several times".

He said that India had "consistently protested with the Chinese side against attempts to alter the ground reality in Shaksgam Valley".

Mao Ning, in response to the Indian foreign ministry spokesperson's comments, said that China and Pakistan had in the 1960s signed a boundary agreement and delimited the boundary between the two countries, terming it "the right of China and Pakistan as sovereign countries".

"The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as an economic cooperation initiative, aims at promoting local socio-economic development and improving people's livelihood," she said.

"The China-Pakistan boundary agreement and CPEC do not affect China's position on the Kashmir issue and the position remains unchanged."

India and China have long clashed over border disputes, but had reached a milestone pact in 2024 on lowering military tensions on their Himalayan border, which escalated after a military clash in 2020 in which 20 soldiers from India and four from China were killed.

Since the pact in 2024, the two countries have taken steps to improve relations, including a resumption of direct flights and enhanced investment and trade flows. However, China and India continue to spar over territory, including Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing calls Zangnan and says is a part of South Tibet — a claim New Delhi has repeatedly dismissed.

Pentagon bought device thought to be linked to Havana Syndrome: *CNN*

Monitoring Desk

THE Defence Department has spent more than a year testing a device purchased in an undercover operation that some investigators think could be the cause of a series of mysterious ailments impacting US spies, diplomats and troops that are colloquially known as Havana Syndrome, according to four sources briefed on the matter.

According to *CNN*, a division of the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations, purchased the device for millions of dollars in the waning days of the Biden administration, using funding provided by the Defence Department, according to two of the sources. Officials paid "eight figures" for the device, these people said, declining to offer a more specific number.

The device is still being studied and there is ongoing debate — and in some quarters of government, scepticism — over its link to the roughly dozens of anomalous health incidents that remain officially unexplained.

CNN has asked the Pentagon, HSI and the DHS for comment. The CIA declined to comment.

The device acquired by HSI produces pulsed radio waves, one of the sources said, which some officials and academics have speculated for years could be the cause of the incidents. Although the device is not entirely Russian in origin, it contains Russian components, this person added.

Officials have long struggled to understand how a device powerful enough to cause the kind of damage some victims have reported could be made portable; that remains a core question, according to one of the sources briefed on the device. The device could fit in a backpack, this person said.

The acquisition of the device has reignited a painful and contentious debate within the US government about Havana Syndrome, known officially as "anomalous health episodes".

The mysterious illness first emerged in late 2016, when a cluster of US diplomats stationed in the Cuban capital of Havana began reporting symptoms consistent with head trauma, including vertigo and extreme headaches. In subsequent years, there have been cases reported around the world.

In the subsequent decade the intelligence community and the Defense Department have sought to understand if those officials were the victims of some kind of directed energy attack by a foreign government — with senior intelligence officials saying publicly that there wasn't enough evidence to support that conclusion and victims arguing that the US government has gaslit them and ignored important evidence that Russia was attacking American government officials.

Still, defence officials considered their findings serious enough that they briefed the House and Senate Intelligence Committees late last year, including reference to the acquired device and its testing.

One key concern now for some officials is that if the technology proves viable it may have proliferated, several of the sources said, meaning that more than one country could now have access to a device that may be capable of causing career-ending injuries to US officials.

CNN was not able to learn where — or from whom — HSI purchased the device, but HSI has a history of collaboration with the Defence Department for operations that take place all over the globe. The office has broad jurisdiction to investigate crimes linked to customs violations, including investigations into the proliferation of US-controlled technology or expertise overseas.

Those investigations are "the single biggest collaboration point between HSI and the US military," according to a former Homeland Security official.

BJP leads the charge as hate against Indian Muslims grows

• Pahalgam, India-Pakistan hostilities drive hate speech with 98 incidents reported in 16 days • India Hate Lab report says 88pc incidents occurred in territories ruled by Modi's party; records 13pc rise from previous year

By Zaki Abbas

ISLAMABAD: More than 1,318 incidents of hate speech against non-Hindu citizens, particularly Muslims, were documented in India last year, with 88 per cent of the incidents reported in states and territories where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is in power, said India Hate Lab and Centre for Study of Organised Hate in its report.

On average, four hate speech events occurred per day, which marks a 13pc increase from 2024, and 97pc increase from 2023, when 668 such incidents were recorded, said the report. According to the report, 98pc of the speeches targeted Muslims: explicitly in 1,156 cases and alongside Christians in 133 cases. This represents an increase of nearly 12 per cent from the 1,147 instances recorded in 2024.

The biggest spike came after the April Pahalgam attack in occupied Kashmir, wherein over 20 people were slain by gunmen. "April recorded the highest monthly spike, with 158 hate speech events coinciding with Ram Navami processions and hate rallies organised in response to the Pahalgam terror attack," the report said.

In the 16-day period between April 22 and May 7, following the Pahalgam attack and preceding active hostilities between India and Pakistan, 98 in-person hate speech events were documented, indicating rapid and nationwide anti-Muslim mobilisation, it said.

Similarly, the hate speech against Christian accounted for 12pc of all events, with only 29 cases explicitly targeting the Christian community. "This represents a nearly 41 percent increase from the 115 anti-Christian hate speech incidents documented in 2024."

Uttar Pradesh topped the hate speech hotspots with 266 incidents, followed by Maharashtra with 193 cases, Uttarakhand with 155, while the capital territory Delhi, recorded 76 events of hate speech. It said 1,164 hate speech incidents (88pc) occurred in states governed by the BJP, either directly or with coalition partners, as well as in BJP-administered Union Territories, reflecting a 25pc increase from the 931 incidents recorded in 2024. Seven opposition-ruled states recorded 154 hate speech events in 2025, a 34 per cent decrease from the 234 incidents documented in these states in 2024.

Out of the total, at least 308 speeches contained explicit calls for violence, while 136 speeches included direct calls to arms. "Maharashtra recorded the highest number of dangerous speeches, with 78 incidents, up from 64 in 2024. Nearly 40 per cent of the state's 193 hate speech events involved explicit calls for violence, the highest proportion recorded for any state."

About 120 hate speeches explicitly called for social or economic boycotts of minority communities, primarily Muslims, 276 speeches called for the "removal or destruction" of worship places, while dehumanising language appeared in 141 speeches.

Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal emerged as the most frequent organisers, linked to 289 hate speech events (22pc), followed by Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad with 138 events.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami emerged as the most prolific hate-speech actor in 2025, with 71 speeches, followed by Antarrashtriya Hindu Parishad chief Pravin Togadia (46) and BJP leader Ashwini Upadhyay (35).

Videos from 1,278 of the 1,318 hate speech events were first shared or live-streamed on social media platforms. Facebook accounted for 942 of the first uploads, followed by YouTube (246), Instagram (67), and X (23), highlighting the central role of social media in amplifying hate speech.

India Hate Lab, founded by U.S.-based Kashmiri journalist Raqib Hameed Naik, is a project of the Center for the Study of Organized Hate, a nonprofit Washington-based think tank. The BJP has previously said India Hate Lab presents a biased picture of India.

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